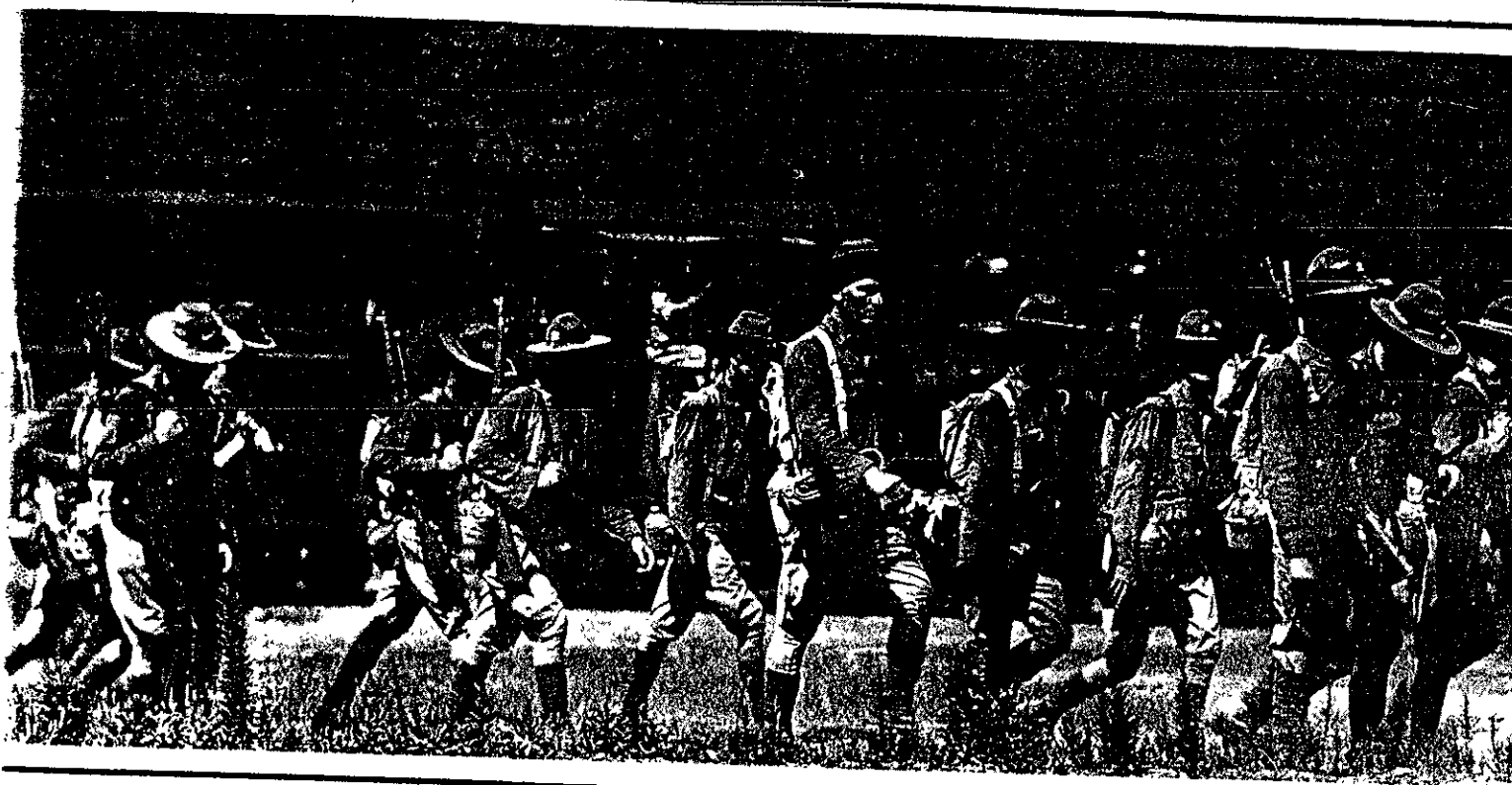


THE 8TH INFANTRY DETRAINING

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On a summer day in 1937 at Fort Benning, Georgia, 14 soldiers of the 8th United States Infantry have detrained from a narrow gauge train and, Springfield rifles slung, are route-stepping away to the right. The tall soldier in center front carries a bugle slung at his side. Just ahead of him, a soldier of morose mien has a large rip in his riding breeches just above the top of his wrap leggings. Two men wear the double stripes of corporal and three the triple stripes of the buck sergeant. The dust from their steps and the pine woods in the background suggest that the group will soon be involved in a tactical field exercise. To their rear by 19 years is World War I; they are moving, more quickly than they know, through the next four years to World War II.

In this picture, an obscure moment in Army history is fixed and displayed. It asks to be put on the wall, to be studied in

detail. Eventually we are compelled to seek out and record the circumstances of this glimpse of the Army in those haphazard years. Army life was said to be one of genteel poverty, but the Army was also described by a British historian as "so much out of the public consciousness that it almost ceased to be an accepted part of American life."

I came along too late to serve in that Army, but now, at a remove of half a century, I have a great urge to go back to Fort Benning, detrain with the 8th Infantry, and stand where several lines of history intersect—the histories of Fort Benning, of a railroad, of an infantry regiment, and of the largely forgotten state-of-the-Army.

Fort Benning, its vast acreage sprawled in west central Georgia by the Chattahoochee River, has been aptly described as a rural trade school that is the spiritual home of the Army's

infantry branch. In September 1918, two months before the somewhat sudden end of World War I, planners in Washington ordered the opening of an Infantry School of Arms at a site near Columbus, Georgia, and construction began with wartime speed and bustle. With the Armistice coming on 11 November, the camp's existence became "iffy," on-again, off-again, with the officers already assigned using every stratagem to keep it in being. On 2 December, 100 members of the West Point Class of November 1918 arrived, and the school—with or without a clear license—was open for business.

In the 70 years since that time, Fort Benning has maintained the core mission of teaching officers to lead platoons, companies, battalions. Whatever its other missions, the Infantry School has been primarily concerned with teaching leaders to move troops to close with and destroy the enemy in ground combat.

After World War II, Winston Churchill marveled that the U.S. Army of 1939, "starved and despised for two decades," could have suddenly produced such a wealth of command talent. A significant part of that top command talent—Bradley, Collins, Ridgway, Decker, Stilwell—either had served on Benning's staff and faculty or had graduated from a class during the five years (from 1927 until 1932) in which, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, as Assistant Commandant, had molded the school. It is of equal significance that the Infantry School, using training philosophies and methods developed during those peacetime years, geared its Officer Candidate School to produce more than 60,000 second lieutenants of Infantry between July 1941 and VJ Day in September 1945.

In the photograph, the men of the 8th Infantry have detrained from a 60-centimeter-gauge railway (1 foot, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, compared to the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches). That railway served as a post utility, carrying students to ranges and tactical training areas from 1919 until 1946. Over the years, the passengers dubbed it the A.E.F. Special, the Bullseye Limited, the Cinder Sista, and the Chattahoochee Choo Choo. A proper official designation would have been the Fort Benning Light Railway, because "light railway" was the designation of this equipment as it had been used in France by the American Expeditionary Forces to be compatible with similar systems used by the British and the French to move supplies forward from standard-gauge railheads.

The U.S. production of such 2-6-2T locomotives eventually came to 305, with their associated rolling stock and rails, much of it left unshipped at the end of the war and after close-out production. Planners from the Office of the Chief of Engineers saw two reasons for using this surplus equipment at peacetime installations: The systems could be used for transportation, and for training troops to use light railway equipment on future battlefields. The new camp at Fort Benning was considered a good test case, and veterans of light railway engineering in France promptly put it, so to speak, on the track.

With two locomotives on hand, the first mile of track at Benning was laid in June 1919. By the end of 1920 there were 16 miles of track to ranges, tactical training areas, and lumber operations. Twelve locomotives were available by March

1922, and by the summer of 1923 the line was up to 27 miles, the highest known figure. At that time, it was reported that it carried 81,000 passengers a year, which figures out to about 300 per instructional day. (By comparison, in one month of wartime 1942, 42,000 students and troops were carried by an inventory of 18 locomotives and 34 passenger cars.)

By 1937, the Dinky Line (another of its nicknames) was supplemented by buses and trucks, and it was more sentiment and tradition than effectiveness that kept it running into the busy World War II years. It was officially closed in November 1946. One locomotive saved from a 1948 War Assets Administration sale remains on display in front of the National Infantry Museum on the main post at Fort Benning.

William A. Ganoë, a devoted and forthrightly partisan Army historian, wrote (in 1943) that the years 1930 and 1931 had been a military slough of despond at its lowest and gloomiest level. "These post-Depression years," he said, "were as discouraging to outward-looking military men as any in our history. The public was as much interested in the army as in polar bears."

Affairs began to improve when Douglas MacArthur became Chief of Staff in November 1930; in Ganoë's words, "It was almost as if the hand of Providence had plucked him by the shoulder....Never did the service so need a champion of his caliber."

ARMY INCREASED STRENGTH

On 2 October 1935, Malin Craig succeeded MacArthur and served until he was replaced by George C. Marshall on 1 September 1939, which happened to be the day Hitler invaded Poland.

From this distance in time, Craig may seem like a valley of historical interest between two towering peaks, but those who have studied this period give him high marks. In the year of his arrival, Congress authorized the Regular Army to increase its enlisted strength to a long-sought goal of 165,000. (That many men would not fill a second seating at the University of Michigan stadium.)

Under Craig's direction, manpower planning went forward with the Protective Mobilization Plan of 1937, and in the same period there evolved, for the first time before actual hostilities, a definite training plan that included the location, size, and scheduling of replacement training centers, unit training centers, and schools. Russell F. Weigley, in a recent (1984) publication, credits Malin Craig with hardheaded realism and determination and says he was "a success because he was uncommonly foresighted and capable... little remembered now, it is questionable whether any soldier did more than he to make possible American military accomplishments in World War II."

Just as Fort Benning sprang from World War I, and just as the narrow gauge railroad was left over from that war, the 8th United States Infantry, in its long history, also had a connection to the Great War of the then not-so-distant past. In the lower left section of the regiment's distinctive insignia,

for example, there is what seems to be a common chicken foot. The heraldic terminology is "in dexter base an eagle's claw erased proper," representing "the maimed strength of the Prussian eagle, the regiment's part in the Occupation of Germany after World War I."

Most of us are surprised to discover that U.S. occupation forces were stationed in Germany as late as 1923, but the 8th Infantry was there. The regiment had arrived in France in September 1918, too late for commitment to combat. While masses of troops were shipping back to Hoboken in the summer of 1919, the 8th Infantry found itself instead—very probably to the consternation of its members—designated to join American Forces in Germany, occupying a Rhineland bridgehead centered on Coblenz. Amid bitter international hickering over the proper treatment of a defeated Germany, they furnished a low-key U.S. presence until the morning of 24 January 1923, when the huge American flag flying above the Rhine from Fortress Ehrenbreitstein was pulled down and the last contingent marched down to the *bahnhof*.

From Antwerp, they sailed home in the transport *St. Mihiel*, described as their "Noah's Ark," taking with them wives, babies, horses, police dogs, monkeys, fish, and furniture. The regiment went directly to Savannah, Georgia, and from that time until the onset of World War II, was split between Fort Screven, near Savannah, and Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, near Charleston.

This dispersion of battalions was the norm. In the mid-1930s, the infantry's 24 regiments in the United States were spread among 45 Army posts, with 24 of those posts having a battalion or less—a situation that, as someone observed, was remarkably reminiscent of the days of the Indian wars. The Army's efforts to close out these posts were stubbornly opposed by local interests, who made their concerns clearly known to their elected representatives. It would be decades before an effective method of establishing an installation "hit list" was concocted.

In the spring of 1932, finishing his duties at Fort Benning, Lieutenant Colonel George Marshall was pleased to draw a command assignment. He would go to Fort Screven to command a battalion of the 8th Infantry. In 1933 he found most of his duty time devoted to administering the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in his area. (The requirements were steep—on 1 May, Franklin Roosevelt told the War Department to produce a plan that would move 250,000 CCC trainees to camp by 1 July.) On 29 June, Marshall, now selected for promotion to colonel, assumed command of the entire 8th Infantry, headquartered at Fort Moultrie. (He was in his command duty only a few months before being ordered to Chicago as senior instructor with the Illinois National Guard.)

The battalions of the 8th Infantry made an annual jaunt to use the superior training areas and facilities of Fort Benning, and one of those trips accounts for this photograph. A veteran soldier who made the 1936 trip from Fort Moultrie as a "john private," writing years later, described highlights of "maneuvers" against the 24th Infantry "school troops" and added, "I recall how welcome that narrow gauge train looked

after we had been out in those woods several days, dirty, tired, having hardly slept.... That was the old Army. I am glad that I was part of it."

The 8th Infantry gained its first battle streamers in the Mexican War and its most recent in Vietnam. On a summer day in 1937, though, that long line of history put some of its men in a training area at Fort Benning.

The tall soldier in the middle of the picture carries a bugle at his hip, an instrument that had been used for centuries as a tool of command, control, and communication. Although there has not been "a company bugler" since the early days of World War II, the lore of the bugle is etched deeply in our past.

Elizabeth B. Custer opens the preface to *Following the*



Guidon (1890) with "Before beginning the story of our summer's camp on Big Creek, Kansas, I should like to make our bugle a more familiar friend to those who know it only by hearsay." She then presents nine pages of well researched and lively history (back to the Crusade of 1248) of the military use of the bugle and a detailed account of the calls used in her day—"the hourly monitor" and "the scourge of ease."

Mrs. Custer carries out her theme by heading each of her 22 chapters with the notes to bugle calls; those accompanied by soldier-invented words hold a special retrospective interest: Sick Call, "Go get your pills"; Fire Call was "Fire, fire, get your buckets," and then two others that have disappeared into the past:

Stable Call:

Come to the stable, all ye who are able
And give your horse some oats and some corn
For if you don't do it your colonel will know it
And you will rue it as sure as you're born.

Rogue's March:

Poor old soldier, poor old soldier
He'll be tarred and feathered and sent to hell,
Because he did not soldier well.

Would the bugler in our picture have known, for example, that in 1900 during China's Boxer Rebellion a young bugler with the 14th Infantry, Calvin P. Titus, scaled the wall leading to the Imperial City in Peking (with a determined "I'll try, sir!") for which deed he earned a Medal of Honor? Would he have known that Titus went on to commissioned service and was chief of staff of the brigade organization based on the 8th Infantry in the Rhineland Occupation?

We can learn something of 1937 uniforms and equipment from a top-to-bottom look at one of the soldiers in the photograph, the fifth man from the left—the one with corporal's stripes and unbuttoned sleeve:

- On his campaign hat, the regiment's distinctive insignia shows squarely. (A magnifying glass helped identify the group as being members of the 8th Infantry.) The campaign hat, of course, is the forerunner of the headgear that distinguishes today's drill sergeant. An issue of the hat in 1912 was called the Montana Peak because of its high crown; a version with a lower crown became general issue in 1921 and was worn until 1940.

- At some point in the evolution of uniforms, riding breeches became the duty attire of soldiers who did not ride horses. A photograph of elements of the 6th Infantry on parade at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, in the mid-1930s shows that, at least in some infantry units, the campaign hat, OD shirt, breeches, and wrap leggings were habitually worn, whether in the field or on parade. At the top end of the rank scale, when Douglas MacArthur was sworn in as Chief of Staff in 1930, both he and the Judge Advocate General wore blouses, Sam Browne belts, riding breeches, and boots with spurs. (Conventional wisdom in the Old Army held that spurs were invented to keep a cavalryman's feet from slipping off his desk.) Breeches went out of use with the final reluctant demise of the horse cavalry in 1943.

- In the meaning of "a covering (as of from leather or cloth)

for the leg," the legging (or leggin) is dated by Webster's Dictionary to 1751. "Puttee" derives from the Hindi *patti*, strip of cloth (1886). Canvas leggings that laced up the side were worn both before and after World War I, but in wartime it was easier to mass-produce the wrap material. These leggings were followed by a combat boot that was devised from a work shoe topped with a wide strap that buckled at the side, then on to the many adaptations of the prized paratrooper jump boot. Puttees made their way into a passage of the grim and graphic writing that characterizes many accounts of World War I: "The ration parties lumbered up Gob Gully past broken trees from which dangled horrible wet legs trailing undone puttees to the ground."

- The infantryman calls his lapel insignia "crossed rifles" (churlish persons of other branches have sometimes called them "idiot sticks"), but the correct terminology is "crossed muskets." The official insignia adopted in 1922 is based on the 1795 model Springfield Arsenal musket, the first official U.S. shoulder weapon made in a government arsenal. In 1937,



the pictured troops are still carrying the modified Springfield 1903 rifle, despite the fact that John C. Garand's "Rifle, semi-automatic, cal. 30, M1" had been adopted in January 1936. The first M1s came off the line in September 1937, but efforts to get them out in quantity were slowed by a plague of minor production problems, criticism of its capabilities, and late-coming competition from a rival semiautomatic, the Johnson. The whole matter got Congressional attention, and by November 1940, *Life* magazine termed it "one of the greatest military squabbles in U.S. history." By the middle of 1941, six months short of Pearl Harbor, only about 1,100 Garand M1s were being produced daily. (On 15 July 1942 I was entrusted with a Garand M1, exhorted to give it good care, and directed to memorize the rifle's serial number. It was 696282.)

In the mid-1930s the Army had a legitimate gripe concerning pay—privates were getting paid less than the men in the Civilian Conservation Corps. William Ganoe wrote, with his usual indignation, of the "superhuman social task for the country" in which "the \$21-a-month trained soldier was making possible the encampments of the \$30-a-month indigents."

At \$21 paid once a month, every dime counted, and competition for specialist ratings was high. In James Jones' classic *From Here to Eternity*, a buddy says to the restless bugler Prewitt, "You got a Pfc. and a Fourth Class Specialist... You got a good life." If that terminology is mysterious to latecomers, a veteran of those years explains it this way:

The rank of Private First Class also included six different levels (#1-6) of class specialists. The basic PFC monthly pay was \$30 with additional pay for each class specialist. The lowest class specialist was #6, which would have been an additional \$3 per month. In our situation at Plattsburg Barracks, for example, the 6th Class was the Browning Automatic Rifleman level, the 5th Class was the Second Cook, and the 4th Class was the First Cook. A "First and First" or PFC First Class Specialist earned a total of \$60.

In 1986, Charles Willeford's book, *Something About a Soldier*, earned a review calling it "a marvelous guide to the masculine ghetto that was our old peacetime Army." Willeford, Depression-driven in 1935, lied about being 16 years of age and went to the Philippines in the Army Air

Corps. Having worked his way up to the position of ammunition truck driver, he approached the end of three years of service and thought surely he would make Private First Class, the grade prescribed by the Table of Organization. Instead, when he was relieved from duty to prepare for homeward shipment, he says:

...a recruit named Daniels, with only six months service, was assigned to the gas truck in my place. He was promoted to P.F.C. the same day... I had been cheated out of my deserved promotion. A P.F.C. made thirty bucks a month, and that extra nine bucks would have made a world of difference to me.

But he made it up later. Stateside, he reenlisted for the 11th Cavalry at the Presidio of Monterey, California, and after a year the troop first sergeant surprised him with a marvelous career opportunity:

Do you mean, I said, still not quite believing it, that if I take a job as second horseshoer, I'll get P.F.C. and fourth class specialist, too? First and fourth?

Willeford ends his account with a wry and eloquently ironic comment on the nature of service in those years:

It just went to prove that all a man had to do in the Army was to live right, work hard, and all the good things would eventually come his way. It had certainly worked out that way for me.

The camera having done its task on that summer day in 1937, these 14 soldiers of the 8th Infantry would continue to march—away from Fort Benning, out of the 8th Infantry and, in their own individual lines of history, into the central experience of their generation, World War II.

We hope they came through in good fashion and that, along with Private First Class Willeford, they lived right, worked hard, and all good things eventually came their way.

Colonel Rolfe L. Hillman, Jr., commissioned Infantry from the United States Military Academy in 1945, served in Japan, Korea, Austria, and Vietnam. On his second assignment to the faculty of the Infantry School, 1959-1962, he began his research on Fort Benning's rail operation. Now retired and living in Arlington, Virginia, he has written extensively for service journals, including several previous articles for *INFANTRY*.

